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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS OF PRESIDING OFFICER

BY HON. ROBERT L. OWEN,
United States Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: When invited to preside at this meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, for an evening devoted to the discussion of equal suffrage for women, I felt honor bound to do so. First because of my duty to women, my greatest benefactors, but above all by my duty to serve the good of society, the welfare of all the people, to the best of my understanding.

Women compose one-half of the human race. In the last forty years, women in gradually increasing numbers have been compelled to leave the home and enter the factory and work-shop. Over seven million women are so employed and the remainder of the sex are employed largely in domestic services. A full half of the work of the world is done by women. A careful study of the matter has demonstrated the vital fact that these working women receive a smaller wage for equal work than men do and that the smaller wage and harder conditions imposed on the woman worker are due to the lack of the ballot.

Many women have a very hard time and if the ballot would help them, even a little, I should like to see them have it. Carroll D. Wright, National Commissioner of Labor, in an address at Smith College on February 22, 1902, said: "The lack of direct political influence constitutes a powerful reason why women's wages have been kept at a minimum." This evidence is thoroughly established by the rise in women's wages for a given amount of work in those countries which have established the equal suffrage, as, New Zealand, South Australia, West Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho.

I do not understand how a self-respecting man, after being satisfied of the truth of this statement, can deny to woman, as a human being, this opportunity to make her living decently, at a fair wage for a given amount of work. I know the ancient hostility and prejudice against women having equal rights. Under the old system

of government where the wages of men were abundant to take care of the home, and where the wife was mistress of a home, industriously engaged by the occupations of home, and supplied by a loving husband with materials for home use, it was a beautiful system and required no exercise of the suffrage. That system is almost entirely gone in many localities. It is absolutely gone with regard to millions of women, who work for their living with their own hands. More than seven million women are now supporting themselves outside the home and many millions of women in addition, are supporting themselves in the houses of those who are well off, by performing domestic service. Women whose husbands are well to do, do not appreciate the importance of equal pay for an equal amount of labor, desired by the poor woman who works in factory, or work-shop and perhaps is required to stand on her feet from ten to sixteen hours a day in order to earn a bare living. The rich woman does not see the neglected girl in the sweat-shop where her hopeless poverty is often preyed upon by the vice of men. I intend to do what I can to give women and working women, a fair opportunity to receive equal pay for equal work. I shall not mock their necessity by calling them queens of the homes, and then denying them the ballot, which is necessary to enable them to receive equal pay for equal work.

Equal pay for equal work is the first great reason justifying this change of governmental policy. There are other reasons which are persuasive: First, women, take it all in all, are the equals of men in intelligence, and no man has the hardihood to assert the contrary. To do so, subjects him to an instant intellectual and spiritual peril, which justifies the argument that such an assertion can not be maintained. The intelligence of women is devoted to objects in which they take a peculiar interest, and the same is true with men.

The man is usually better informed with regard to State government, but women are better informed about house government, and she can learn State government with as much facility as he can learn how to instruct children, properly feed and clothe the household, care for the sick, play on the piano, or make a house beautiful. It avails nothing to say that women are not familiar with State laws. They know pretty nearly as much as the average man, and if they had the right to participate, would soon know quite as much as the average man, and this would be a distinct gain in government for the whole community.

The woman ballot will not revolutionize the world. Its results in Colorado, for example, might have been anticipated. First, it did give women better wages for equal work; second, it led immediately to a number of laws the women wanted, and the first laws they demanded were laws for the protection of the children of the State, making it a misdemeanor to contribute to the delinquency of a child; laws for the improved care of defective children; also, the Juvenile Court for the conservation of wayward boys and girls; the better care of the insane, the deaf, the dumb, the blind; the curfew bell to keep children off the streets at night; raising the age of consent for girls; improving the reformatories and prisons of the State; improving the hospital service of the State; improving the sanitary laws, affecting the health of the homes of the State. Their interest in the public health is a matter of great importance. Above all, there resulted laws for improving the school system.

Several important results followed; both political parties were induced to put up cleaner, better men, for the women would not stand a notoriously corrupt or unclean candidate. The headquarters of political parties became more decent and the polling places became respectable. The bad women, enslaved by mercenary vice, do not vote and good women do vote in as great proportion as men. Every evil prophecy against granting the suffrage has failed. The public men of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho give it a cordial support.

The testimony is universal:

First, it has not made women mannish; they still love their homes and children just the same as ever, and are better able to protect themselves and their children because of the ballot.

Second, they have not become office-seekers, nor pothouse politicians. They have not become swaggerers and insolent on the streets. They still teach good manners to men, as they always have done. It has made women broader and greatly increased the understanding of the community at large of the problems of good government; of proper sanitation, of pure food, of clean water, and all such matters in which intelligent women would naturally take an interest.

It has not absolutely regenerated society, but it has improved it. It has raised the educational qualification of the suffrage, and

has elevated the moral standard of the suffrage, because there are more criminal men than criminal women. In Colorado and Utah only two per cent of the prisoners in the penitentiary are women, and in Wyoming and Idaho there are no women prisoners.

The venerable Mrs. Eva Moore, of Guthrie, Oklahoma, put the argument in a nut-shell, when she said, in giving her reasons for wanting the ballot: "I am a human being, an individual, seventy-three years old, making my own living and my opportunity to do so is controlled by the law. My property rights are subject to the law.

"If I commit a crime, they may deprive me of my liberty, or of my life. Is there any righteous reason that I should not have a voice in the election of worthy, honorable men to make just laws and administer them?"

The great doctrine of the American Republic that "*all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed,*" justifies the plea of one-half of the people, the women, to exercise the suffrage. The doctrine of the American Revolutionary War that taxation without representation is unendurable, justifies women in exercising the suffrage. One great advantage, however, of the suffrage is in raising women to a position of greater honor and dignity so that the children of the land shall show and feel greater reverence and honor for their mothers, and that the mothers may teach the elementary principles of good government while they are teaching them good manners, morality and religion.

No nation can rise higher than its women, and for this reason it is of prime importance to give the women of the land the suffrage, so as to elevate their status, and this, not alone for their sake, but for the sake of the whole community.

It is not alone that women need the ballot to protect their rights to a livelihood and to protect their children from vice, and to afford their children every means of instruction and guidance a civilized law should afford, but the country needs the female influence, because this influence will be especially exerted to improve the State charities, State sanitation, the protection of children and the beautifying of cities, and no possible harm can come from, according to the women of the land, this new respect and dignity. Are we afraid to trust our own wives, our own mothers, our own daughters! We can trust them with our lives and be assured of their fidelity and loyalty, and I, for one, intend to give them in public the confidence and trust I entertain in my private life.